THE HYMN SOCIETY OF AMERICA

SUGGESTIONS FOR HYMN FESTIVALS

(Including some facts about those held in 1935-36)

The movement for Hymn Festivals, which arose spontaneously in England and Canada, is being fostered in the United States by the Hymn Society of America, through the co-operation of ministers and organists all over the country. Last year the Society issued a leaflet of suggestions for Hymn Festivals. Many church workers and musicians read accounts of this Festival movement in the religious and musical journals, and they sent for the leaflet together with descant suggestions and sample programs. Later on, a large number of them forwarded the programs of their own Festivals, which indicated a widespread interest in the singing of hymns by congregations in well-planned services of worship.

About forty of these programs have been most carefully analysed. More than one-half of the services were actually held on November 24, 1935, which was the date suggested. In one church twenty-six choirs were located throughout the congregation. There was antiphonal singing between the choir and the congregation. At a service in New York sponsored by the Society itself groups of singers from thirty churches had seats reserved for them in the pews: these included junior choirs located in the gallery, who contributed descants and antiphonal verses. The splendid service given by the Southern California Chapter of the American Guild of Organists enlisted five choirs. A service, led jointly by the choirs of two churches about fifty miles apart on Long Island, was held in both churches on consecutive Sundays. In one church the enthusiasm was so great that a series of evening festivals was held, using hymns of various types well planned for each service.

In the present leaflet this experience is made available to those who are anxious to prepare for such service, while the definitions and suggestions already issued are restated briefly.

The interest in congregational singing is rapidly increasing. Several important hymnbooks have been published recently and many churches are considering their purchase. Hymn Festivals serve to introduce a new book to these congregations, so that nine-tenths of its contents does not remain unknown. In other churches the present book is being still further explored. In any event the art and practice of congregational singing is being stimulated and public worship revitalized through special Festivals of hymn singing.

Churches throughout the country are being asked to hold these festivals, and the date again suggested is the Sunday before Thanksgiving Day, which also lies nearest to St. Cecilia's Day.* While such a festival is equally helpful and inspiring if held at any time, yet there is real value in the observance of one day simultaneously by groups of people scattered all over the country. It differs from the special "causes" which press so insistently for recognition in our churches; it can be made a celebration of almost any subject that has been chosen for the theme of a worship service.

What is a Hymn Festival?

It is a service of worship in which hymns receive special emphasis. It should be joyful in character, with a well-planned order and a more elaborate pattern than usual. It in-

* In 1936 this date falls on November 22.

volves real preparation and study, including some form of congregational rehearsal. Its theme should be well brought out, with the materials of the highest type acceptable to the whole group, making the service worshipful and dignified, instead of being just an informal program of hymns. There may well be one or two simple descants, as suggested below. A service of this type is possible in any church, whether large or small.

Should Such a Festival Have a Definite Theme?

The first step in preparing the service is the choice of a definite subject. The hymns may be grouped according to the growth of the Christian Church—historically and as an expression of the faith of other ages. The theme may emphasize the devotional thought of the different Christian churches. It may deal with thanksgiving—spiritual, national, local, individual, etc. It may stress the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, bringing peace and justice and brotherhood.

Some of the themes and titles used last year are as follows: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord," "The life of Christ," "Christ in the world," "Thy kingdom come," "A perpetual Covenant," "In everything give thanks," "Hymns of the inner life," "The Savior of the world." Other services used special sequences and groupings of hymns such as: "Christmas through the ages," "Hymn singing through the centuries" and "Youthful troubadours of thanksgiving," the latter bringing together eight well-known hymns, whose authors ranged from thirty-two years old (John Henry Newman) to only fifteen years (John Milton). This was a Festival for Young People.

The titles of the addresses made at these Festivals indicate the whole-hearted cooperation existing between minister and musician. Some of them were: "Christianity without music," "Wings of silver," "The ministry of music," "Hymns as a medium of religious culture," "Keeping up spiritual health." Several Festivals were addressed by an organist or other church musician on such subjects as "The evolution of the hymn," and "Hints on hymn singing," the latter delivered in an Episcopal church after the Litany during the morning service. In two Methodist churches morning services were devoted to the dedication of their new hymnals, using the order of worship specially prepared for the purpose, and such was the enthusiasm in both churches that a stirring Hymn Festival was held the same evening. An organ and a cross were dedicated at other Festival services of hymns. The care taken to give these services a true thematic sequence was a good index of the degree of preparation they received. In a few cases very little preparation was revealed in the program, but in nearly all churches the minister and organist shared in a service on which they had obviously lavished great care. In a few instances there was evidence that the congregation itself had studied in advance the new material introduced in the service.

What Materials are Available?

The hymn-book at present in use by any church is necessarily the basis of the service, but a determined effort must be made to sing new and other unfamiliar hymns, in addition to those in common use. Other hymn texts and tunes may be introduced, taking care that they are carefully assimilated. Several handbooks to the hymnals are now accessible, including the Handbook to the Scotch Hymnary, and that for the Presbyterian Hymnal. The preface to the New Hymnal (Episcopal) is valuable. Books about hymns should be consulted, such as Gilman's "Evolution of the English Hymn," Benson's "Studies of Familiar Hymns," Series I and II, Price's two books of "Hymn Stories," Smith's "Lyric Religion," etc. These and many other books can be studied at certain libraries. In New York the collection of the Hymn Society is arranged with the music section of the library at Union Theological Seminary. In other cities there are equally valuable hymnic libraries, such as those at Princeton Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary (Pittsburgh), Drew Theological Seminary (Madison, N. J.) and at many great universities. The names of these important libraries will be furnished on request.

How May the Materials be Used?

Hymns may be sung in many ways. Stanzas and refrains can be taken antiphonally, or sung in unison—generally as a climax. Other hymns gain from being sung entirely in unison. Hymns may be interwoven with Scripture or meditations, forming antiphones. They may be sung as prayers, or they may take the place of the creed. In fact hymns are among the greatest expressions of the Christian faith that we possess.

The singing of descant—an obbligato to the air of the tune, usually in the soprano—is entirely possible in any church where there is genuine interest in hymn singing. The increase in the use of descants is most encouraging. No fewer than sixteen tunes were thus treated in the programs for 1935 that were analyzed. They are as follows, with the name of the composer of the descant, where it was given:

Adeste Fideles	Hesperus
Aurelia (Darnell)	Lyons
Chester	Nicæa (Lutkin)
Coronation (D. M. Williams)	Maryton (F. H. Hopper)
Dix (G. Shaw)	Nun Danket (G. Shaw)
Duke Street	Old Hundredth
Dundee	St. Anne (G. Shaw)
Germany (T. T. Noble)	Whittier (W. B. Angell)

(written for the Hymn Society)

Also Tallis's Canon was sung in its original form, as a canon, with an explanation in the program notes.

Suggestions for the use of descant have been prepared, in response to the wide demand for them. They may be obtained from Miss Grace Leeds Darnell, 521 West 126th Street, New York.

What are the Responsibilities of Minister and Organist?

The minister, whose share in the whole service continues from the choice of the subject to the last detail in the projection of the service, may introduce Scripture passages or very brief devotional—not programmatic—meditations between the hymns. At least one less familiar hymn may be read by a person who realizes the possibilities of conveying the thought beautifully. This suggests that one purpose of the Festival is to give the words of the hymns the significance they deserve. A good singable tune may tend to detract from the value of the text. All tunes should be singable, but if more attention were paid to the message of the words and their suitability as used in the service, they would not be secondary to the music in the minds of the people. Their meaning would be reinforced through the noble tunes to which they are set.

The organist is responsible for the character of the music used in the service, and in large measure for the selection of the hymns. He plans for the conduct of the congregational rehearsals; in any case he secures some use of the hymns by the congregation before the Festival itself. His organ preludes, interludes and postludes can be based on hymn tunes. There are many of these available, some of them being very simple.* The organist may also play a tune through, either alone or with a solo instrument such as violin or 'cello. In addition he may use free accompaniment for certain verses, which must be sung in unison, so that his variant harmonies may have their full effect. Such harmonies should generally be written out beforehand.

A detailed program, indicating clearly what is to be done by the members of the congregation, should be in their hands. This will save uncertainty and confusion, and keep the service free from announcements. Another helpful plan is to print the first line of the hymn as well as its number, and also the name of the tune. In many churches the name and dates of the composer are added, together with that of the author. This is specially valuable when there is direct mention of the message and source of the hymns themselves. The names of the composers of all descants would enable us to share this information with others who desire to obtain descant material. It is most significant that the organ numbers in one church were entitled "Ministry of Music," instead of prelude and postlude, and the note was added that no one should enter or leave the church while they were being played.

How Can Union or Mass Hymn Festivals be Planned?

For those who are holding Festivals in large metropolitan areas a brief account of the effort made in New York last year may be helpful. Six organists or ministers were elected Festival chairmen for the larger Protestant bodies, and in October they personally placed the Hymn Society's material in the hands of all the active metropolitan churches. As a result a large number of Hymn Festivals were held in them. Those

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* A list of them, with anthems that are based on hymn tunes and preserve the form of the tunes in their treatment, has been prepared and can be obtained from Mr. Horace M. Hollister, 215 East 73rd Street, New York, by enclosing a stamped long envelope.

whose interest had been thus aroused were later asked to join in a massed Festival to be held at Riverside Church. The effect produced at that service by the solid groups of singers scattered all over the church was surprising. This Festival showed that such groups, all of whose members had studied the hymns for the service in advance, could support the rest of the congregation so well that unfamiliar hymns were employed with telling effect.

What of the Future?

The goal of the movement is to increase the share of the congregation in the whole service, which will surely result from a revival of hymn singing. It will thus enjoy a richer, more reverent type of worship from which the note of joy is never absent. It will undertake real study of hymns, which will lead to informal singing of hymns and from which will come Festival services at which the great lyrics of the church will be sung as they never could be otherwise.

It is hoped that churches throughout the country will hold at least one well-planned Hymn Festival during the coming season (1936-1937). In large communities joint Festivals will naturally result from the services held in individual churches. The Chapters of the American Guild of Organists may well plan to include an official Hymn Festival among their winter activities, combining the use of several choirs in the chancel with the placing of many prepared singers in groups throughout the congregation. The whole subject of congregational singing can be discussed at a regular meeting of the Chapter, at which time plans for the Festival can be developed.

Those who hold such Festivals are asked to send in the programs to the Hymn Society, with some account of the materials used and the experience gained. A copy of the address made at the service should be forwarded, if possible. It will be returned promptly on request. General inquiries about Hymn Festivals will be answered by Reginald L. McAll, 2268 Sedgwick Avenue, New York. The programs may be sent to him or to the Corresponding Secretary of the Hymn Society, Miss Emily S. Perkins, Riverdale-on-Hudson, New York City. Inquiries about the work and purposes of the Hymn Society will be answered by Miss Perkins. All correspondents are asked to enclose a long stamped self-addressed envelope for reply, when pamphlets are requested.

New York City, June, 1936.